

City Council member Tom Rasmussen does Seattle's Gay community proud

Rasmussen, other councilmembers serve meals to the poor at City Hall Park despite Mayor Nickel's order to suspend the service

by Matt Nagle
SGN Managing Editor

City Councilmember Tom Rasmussen joined fellow councilmembers Jean Godden and Peter Steinbrueck Wednesday evening to assist The Meals Partnership Coalition at City Hall Park serve meals to the hungry. Earlier this week Mayor Greg Nickels issued an order restricting the meal providers from serving meals after 4:00 p.m. at the park because, as Nickels said in a statement Wednesday, "worsening conditions made it unsafe for the hungry and for providers."

In protest of the mayor's order to suspend the program, Rasmussen, Godden and Steinbrueck rallied behind the poor, rolled up their sleeves and provided meals as usual, accompanied by many of Seattle's civic and religious leaders, offering friendship, hope and a warm meal to the homeless. The Mayor had said violators of the 4:00 p.m. curfew would be cited for violating the restriction. No such citations were made.

"We are going to find a solution to the mayor's concerns, but people shouldn't go hungry while the City figures out what needs to be done," said Rasmussen.

On Thursday, the mayor recanted his suspension of the meals program and announced that the program would return to the Public Safety Building, a venue that worked safely for several years. The Public Safety Building is scheduled to be demolished in the near future, but the mayor said the program can remain there until that time.

"I'm pleased to hear that the mayor has made a decision to move the evening meal program back to the Public Safety Building," Rasmussen said. "This will allow the program to continue while we work together to find a long-term solution."

Rasmussen, Chair of the City Council's Health and Human Services Committee - and Seattle's first openly Gay male councilmember - has offered to work with the mayor and the Human Services Department to find an alternative site or another solution to continuing the distribution of evening meals in downtown Seattle.

"While I don't like disobeying the law," said Councilmember Jean Godden, "sometimes civil disobedience is called for to draw attention to the

needs of the poor. We can and must do better to help these organizations serve meals to our homeless,” she added.

Seattle’s citizens are compassionate people,” said Councilmember Peter Steinbrueck, “and we believe we can work together to assure the poor and homeless they will have a safe place among friends to get a healthy meal.”

“I am grateful for the dedication and commitment of these meal providers,” said Rasmussen. “They have told me the program had been going smoothly until the City moved it from the Public Safety Building site to City Hall Park. I would ask the Mayor to work with them to first seek a solution to his concerns about public safety before ending the program,” he added.

More than 300 meals are served each evening at City Hall Park by a coalition of non-profit organizations. In spite of the City’s budget challenges over the last several years, the City Council has prioritized the funding of food programs and other human services.

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